

SUGARCANE GROWN IN
700,000 HECTARES IN
MAHARASHTRA

SEASONAL WORKERS –
15 LACS APPROX

UNDER-14 CHILDREN WHO
HELP OUT IN THE FIELD –
2 LACS APPROX

The Price Some Pay for Sugar

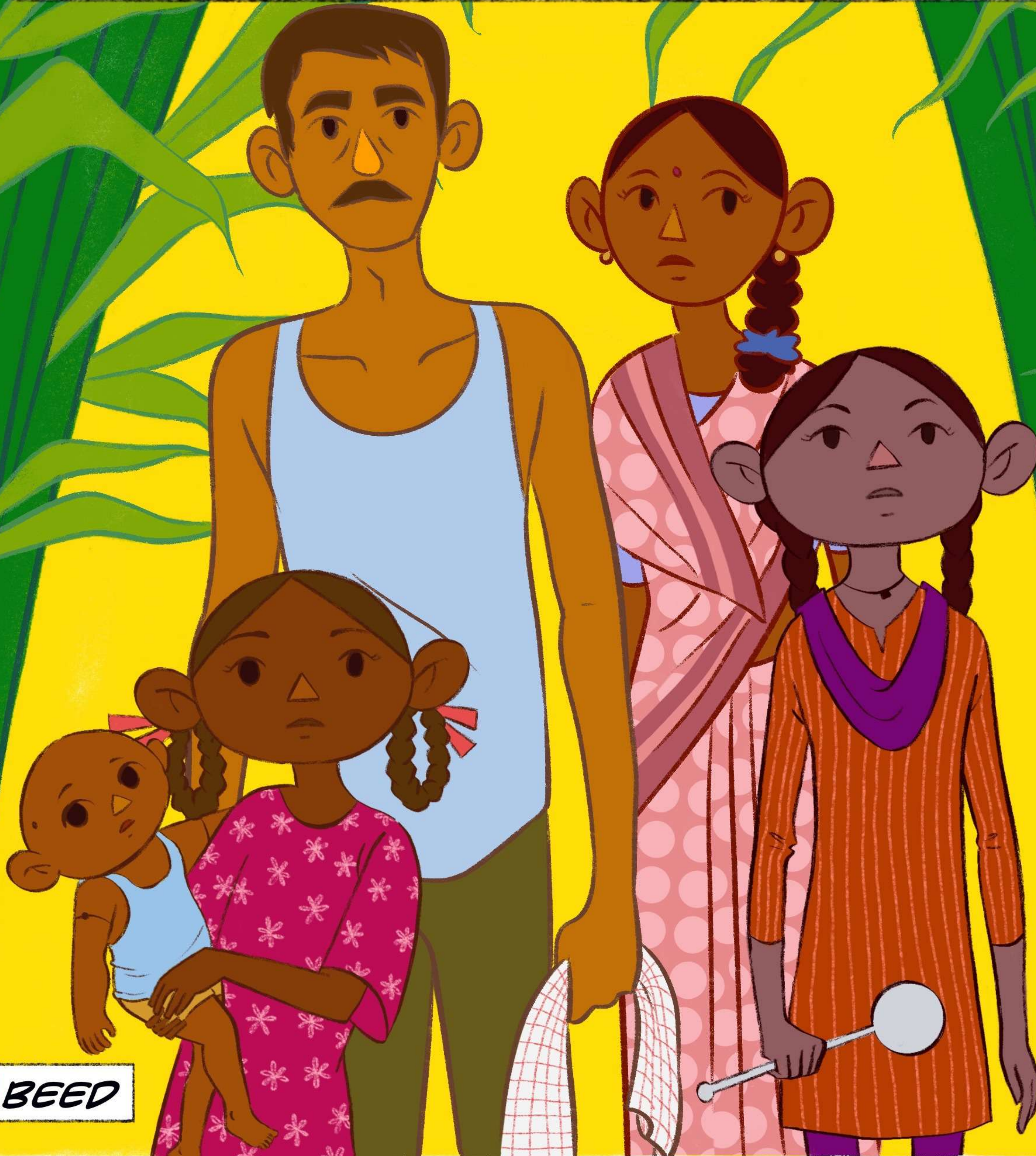
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AFTER TRAVELLING FOR 11 HOURS IN AN OPEN TRUCK FROM THE REMOTE BODHKA VILLAGE, THE KEDAR FAMILY BEGINS THEIR FIRST DAY OF WORK IN A MARATHWADA SUGARCANE FIELD. THE KEDARS ARE AMONG THE 1.6 MILLION FARMERS WHO CULTIVATE SUGARCANE ON 700,000 HECTARES OF LAND IN MAHARASHTRA.



RAM KEDAR IS ON HIS 7TH HOUR OF CUTTING SUGARCANE. HE HAS ANOTHER SEVEN MORE HOURS TO GO TODAY IN THE BLISTERING HEAT. IT IS BACK-BREAKING, LABOUR-INTENSIVE WORK.

DAY 1

📍 MARATHWADA



RAM'S DAUGHTER, 6-YEAR-OLD ADITI MUST WORK TOO, AS DO THE STAGGERING 0.2 MILLION CHILDREN HERE. THIS CLASS ONE STUDENT WAS FORCED TO DROP OUT OF SCHOOL WHEN HER PARENTS MIGRATED. A COMMON TREND AMONGST CHILDREN OF SUCH WORKERS.

COME, KRISHNA. DON'T CRAWL TOO FAR. COME HERE, MUNNA.

OYE ADITI, BRING THE BABY HERE. GIVE HIM HIS DINNER. I WORKED FOR 11 HOURS TODAY. MY BODY HURTS.

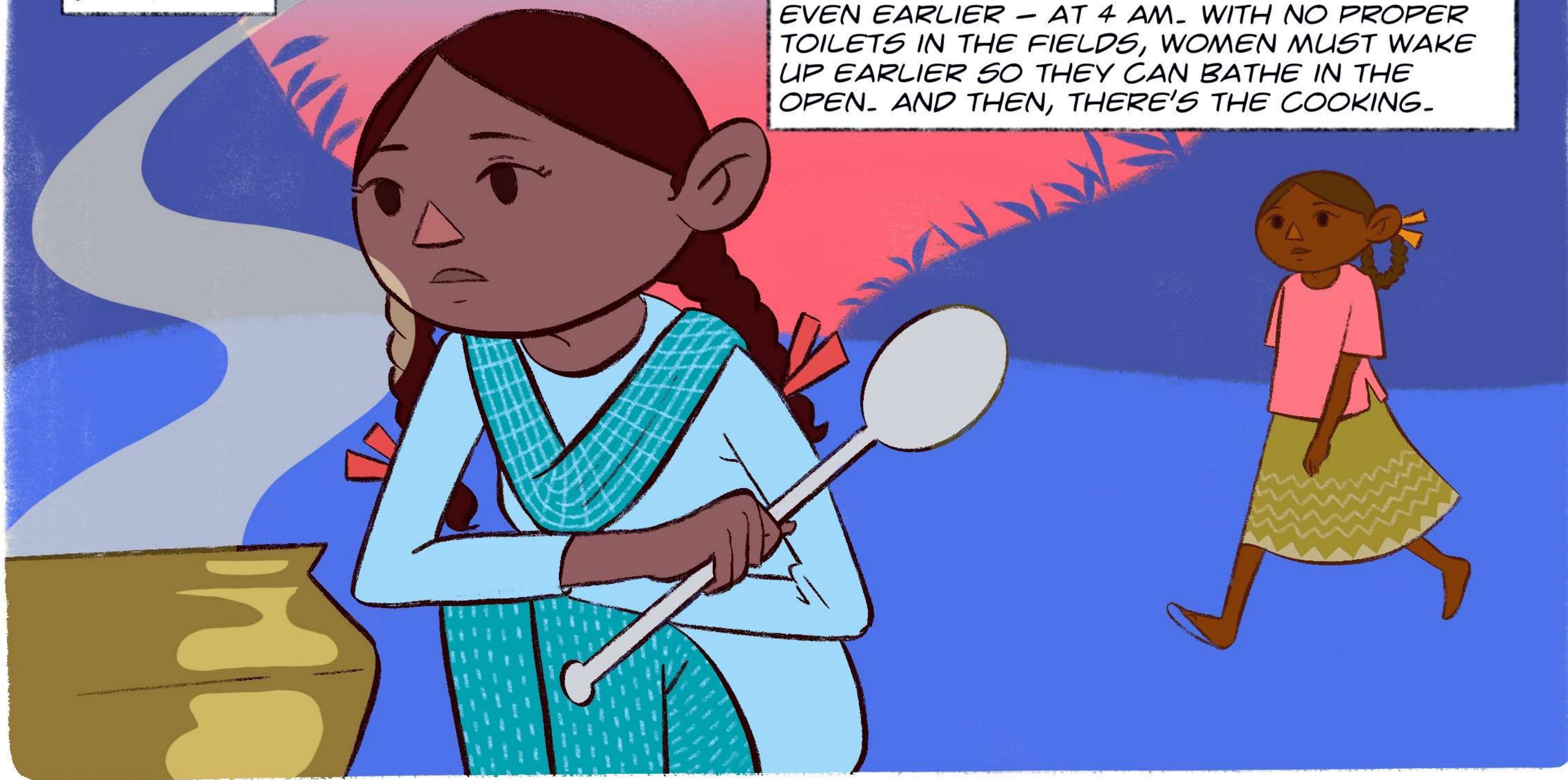


DAY 7

📍 LABOUR COLONY

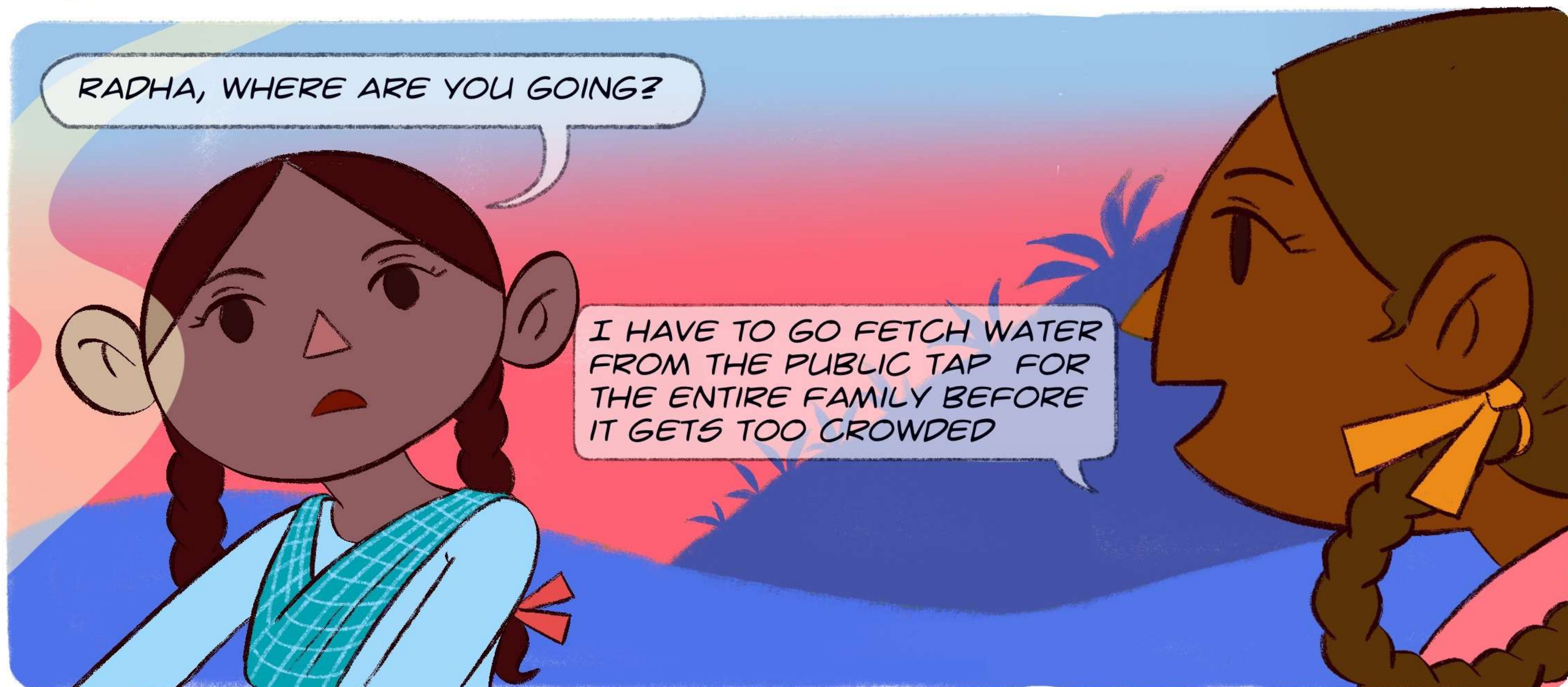
DAY 23

WHILE RAM'S DAY STARTS AT 5 A.M., HIS WIFE SEEMA'S AND DAUGHTER ADITI'S BEGINS EVEN EARLIER - AT 4 AM. WITH NO PROPER TOILETS IN THE FIELDS, WOMEN MUST WAKE UP EARLIER SO THEY CAN BATHE IN THE OPEN. AND THEN, THERE'S THE COOKING.



RADHA, WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

I HAVE TO GO FETCH WATER FROM THE PUBLIC TAP FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY BEFORE IT GETS TOO CROWDED



DAY 35

BECAUSE THOSE ARE FOR
IMPORTANT PEOPLE, ADITI.
WE ARE JUST WORKERS ON
THE FIELD.

MA, WHY IS THERE
ELECTRICITY IN THE MILLS
AND NOT IN OUR HUTS
HERE?

MAHARASHTRA HAS THE LARGEST NUMBER OF SUGAR MILLS
IN INDIA AND THEY ARE NEVER SHORT OF ELECTRICITY.



A DAY OFF MEANS DOCKED WAGES. WOMEN OFTEN SUFFER FROM MISCARRIAGES DUE TO CONSTANT BENDING TO CUT CANES. WORKERS DO NOT EVEN GET ANY MEDICAL ALLOWANCE. SEEMA IS INJURED FROM CHOPPING SUGARCANE.

WE WILL LOSE WORK AND MONEY! YOU GO LOAD THE CANES, ADITI. DON'T WASTE YOUR WAGE. I'LL BE FINE.

DAY 66

TO UNDERMINE THE WORKERS' COLLECTIVE BARGAINING POWER, CONTRACTORS TYPICALLY HIRE PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT VILLAGES. THEY CAN'T UNIONISE, AND THEY HAVE NO HEALTHCARE.

I WILL CUT TILL LUNCH.
YOU LOAD.
THEN WE WILL SWITCH.



DAY 80

WE DIDN'T MAKE ENOUGH
THIS SEASON.

EVEN AFTER ANOTHER
MONTH OF CUTTING IN
KARNATAKA, MY LOANS
WILL BE PENDING.

FOR US, 3 THINGS IN
LIFE ARE CERTAIN –
SICKLE. DEBT. DEATH.

I HAVE BEEN
DOING THIS FOR
22 YEARS.



DAY 125



AT THE END OF A TIRING 5-MONTH CUTTING SEASON, RAM'S FAMILY WILL HAVE BARELY EARNED RS 60,000 RUPEES. THIS WILL HAVE TO SUFFICE FOR THE NEXT 6 MONTHS OF PAYING OFF LOANS, MAKING ENDS MEET AND SUPPORTING OLD RELATIVES. THE FAMILY RETURNS TO THEIR VILLAGE... UNTIL THEY MIGRATE AGAIN NEXT SEASON.